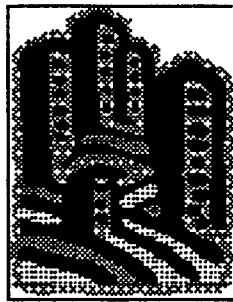
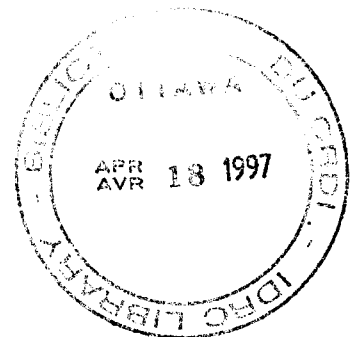


Une Histoire de Deux Villes
Comparing Canadian Community Gardening
Programs in Montreal and Toronto
by
Sean Cosgrove
Toronto Food Policy Council
1994



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UNE HISTOIRE DE DEUX VILLES: COMPARING CANADIAN COMMUNITY GARDENING PROGRAMS IN MONTREAL AND TORONTO

INTRODUCTION

At first glance, the production of food in urban areas might seem out of place. Historically, cities have always produced some of their own food and, in times of crisis, cities have satisfied a large proportion of their food needs. Today, horticulture is a major recreational activity in the cities of western countries. Gardening activities in urban areas have enjoyed fairly steady popular and municipal support in northern Europe compared to North America, where the situation is more variable.

In the early 1970s, Montreal and many cities in the United States developed sophisticated gardening programs, with and without municipal government support. Compared to these cities, the evolution of gardening programs in Toronto has been much slower. Toronto and Montreal have vibrant inner city neighbourhoods but there are few vacant lots in which to site neighbourhood community gardens. This is not the case for cities in the eastern United States where the number of vacant lots is comparatively larger.

Toronto is the largest city in Canada with a population of 2.5 million in the metropolitan area and 4 million in the surrounding urban region. Toronto lacks a cohesive and comprehensive community gardening consciousness. Although the Island of Montreal, with a population of 2 million, is much smaller, this city has one of the best community gardening programs in North America.

1. METROPOLITAN MONTREAL: Community Gardening Profile

Montreal began its community gardening program in the years following the OPEC crisis of 1973. Montreal has a very extensive, well organized, and well supported community gardening program. Metro Montreal has 15 municipalities. There are over 100 community gardens on the Island of Montreal. Of these municipalities, the City of Montreal maintains the most community gardens with some 75 garden sites and a total of 6654 allotment plots. The largest garden site has 255 plots. The information in the paragraphs below is on the City of Montreal's gardening program.

Their program is run by the Department of Recreation, Parks and Community Development. The City provides topsoil, manure, fencing, water, tools, toilets, a clubhouse or toolsheds. There are also five paid horticultural animators who are responsible for a group of sites. These resource people answer any horticultural inquiries, work with the executive of each garden group, and report on any maintenance problems. Maintenance is provided by the City of Montreal's Public Works Department.

1.1 History

In the early 1970s, Italian and Portuguese immigrants in North Montreal district were very aggressive gardeners. Noticing this, the City began to regulate gardening activities. The introduction of regulations triggered a process whereby community gardens were endorsed and gardeners encouraged to organize. The City of Montreal soon had to deal with the competition between neighbourhoods and groups to get land for gardens. The community gardens found a political champion at the Montreal Botanical Garden, Pierre Bourque, who sheltered the fledging program under his wing. There was great expansion until the program grew so large that administering it became very difficult. A complete review of the program by the City of Montreal took place in 1985, the year of the departure of Montreal's long serving mayor, Jean Drapeau.

The review was very significant and resulted in the establishment of clear policies for the creation and operation of the gardens. The review mandated that all gardens use organic methods. Horticultural animators were made responsible for assisting gardeners during the transition to organic gardening. Ten such animators were hired for the six-month gardening season.

The Department of Recreation and Community Development was given overall responsibility for the community gardening program. This Department co-ordinates the activities of the following municipal departments: Habitation & Urban Development, Provisioning & Buildings, Public Works, and Planning & Policy.

1.2 Situation in 1995

The community gardening program is especially popular with senior gardeners (age 55 and over). This age group constitutes the majority of gardeners in 39 gardens sites. and in two thirds of the largest gardens. There is a multi-cultural presence in many gardens. For example, in eight gardens, the majority of gardeners are neither of British nor French descent.

The gardens are very productive and there are long waiting lists to obtain allotment plots. Registration costs \$5.00 per year and solicitations are sent out in the monthly hydro bill. The City could create 12 new garden sites on the basis of the current waiting list.

Every gardener must agree to the rules of the garden program. Insurance is provided within the program. Gardeners are grouped in lots of 10 or 15 for insurance purposes. There is some flexibility in respect to how each allotment garden is organized. However, gardeners must grow at least five different types of vegetables. They are presently allowed to grow flowers in the common areas, along the fenced borders.

Many of the garden sites are on institutional land. Montreal relocated 12 gardens 1986-89, at a capital cost of \$400,000. The estimated cost of establishing a new garden site of 90 plots is \$20,000. Official zoning has been amended to accommodate 13 of the garden sites. Twenty-two gardens are located in City parks. The community gardening program of the City of Montreal is by far the largest and best organized program in Canada. This is probably the result of the incorporation of gardening into the overall plan for community development.

1.3 Key Challenges for the Future:

In the early 1990s, the community gardening program has conducted composting experiments in a third of the gardens, has donated produce to community kitchens, and improved access for disabled gardeners. Recently though, the program has suffered from cuts in funding and has reduced the number of horticultural animators by half.

Other issues currently faced by the program are ensuring the permanence of garden sites and clarifying the role and responsibilities of the municipal departments involved in the program. Finding land for new garden sites, providing for the expansion of existing ones and, replacing gardens sites that have been lost to development are difficult challenges. A new City Administration has recently been elected. With the constraints on available resources, the role of each department must be re-evaluated. The Parks Department had been re-organized and may once again be given most of the responsibility for administering the community gardening program.

The former co-ordinator of the Botanical Garden, Pierre Borque (nicknamed the Green Giant) was elected Mayor of Montreal in October of 1994. His election could mean more resources for the community gardens and he has indicated a wish to see more horticultural therapy projects in the City. Mayor Borque also

proposes radical decentralization of city services to neighbourhood districts. This is in an era of tightening civic budgets in Montreal and it remains to be seen if the gardening committees, used to a high level of funding and support, can respond to the challenge of doing more on their own.

2. METROPOLITAN TORONTO: Community Gardening Profile

Toronto had "victory" gardens in both wars. As with other cities, the period after 1973 caused a re-evaluation of the need for urban horticulture and new garden spaces were established, mainly on hydro rights-of-way in the city's suburbs.

Toronto's High Park allotment garden site dates from this period. It is one of the three City of Toronto allotment gardens which are administered by the Department of Parks and Recreation. There are a total of 375 allotment plots at the three sites.

Within Metro Toronto, the community gardening programs are run by the Department of Parks and Recreation. Unlike Montreal, there is no decentralization of power in the form of gardeners clubs. The gardens are generally located in regional open space and access is mainly by automobile. In all, Metro Toronto has 15 community allotment sites with 2000 available plots. Please refer to Appendix 1 for specific information on these programs.

In addition to these allotment gardens, the Food Action Project of FoodShare Metro Toronto was started in the mid-1980s. This initiative involved the creation of approximately 15 community gardening projects. The projects were sponsored by social housing agencies such as the Metro Toronto Housing Authority and is now increasingly sponsored by Community Health Centres.

A further 15 or so small community gardening projects that could be classified as neighbourhood community gardens have been identified in the city. These gardens are usually tucked away in left-over space, such as on rooftops or terraces.

2.1 Healthy Cities

Toronto has shown leadership in urban environmental management by producing documents like the Healthy Toronto 2000 Strategy which commits the city to creating and maintaining social and physical environments supportive of health. Healthy Cities involves a holistic planning approach. Trevor Hancock of Healthy Communities Metro Toronto has said that "it is no longer possible to

compartmentalize neatly the city's problems into parks, police, engineering, public health, urban planning, and other relatively narrowly defined specialities."

In the Healthy Toronto 2000 Strategy, explicit encouragement is given to the Toronto Food Policy Council to investigate the potential of urban food production. In 1989, the Healthy City Office was mandated by City Council to address the need for a Community Development Policy for Metro Toronto. In 1991, various municipal departments were asked to form an interdepartmental technical working group to investigate community gardening.

At the same time, they helped a community coalition and urban gardening resource group, called Grow T.O.gether Community Gardeners (GROW T.O.), to organize. The technical working group and GROW T.O., have not been in close enough contact to ensure a good cooperation between them. Both groups began operations during the most severe recession in Toronto since the 1930s. As a result of the recession, GROW T.O. had to operate with very few government or private grants. Similarly, the plans of the technical working group were not carried out due to government cutbacks and downsizing.

In spite of the above constraints, the technical working group produced a report, the Garden City Report, with 18 recommendations. These recommendations were adopted by City Council in December 1993. GROW T.O. made arrangements for groups and individuals to comment on the report and help modify it. GROW T.O. was also involved in the assessing the results of the pilot phase of the implementation of the recommendations. The Garden City Report makes provision for the realignment of departmental budgets and for cooperation with other partners to help local groups establish community gardens. The Department of Parks and Recreation is the lead agency. If approached by a group with no site, they will refer them to the City Property Department. If a site is found, the Department of Public Health can help with soil tests. If the tests are good, the Department of Public Works can advise on garden design and implementation, on composting, and so on.

GROW T.O. has obtained permission to plan a new garden site in city parkland, a very encouraging sign. Several other groups have shown interest in this site, but will be responsible for developing the garden sites. It is hoped that the Department of Public Health's Community Health Officers can animate some of the groups.

2.2 Situation in 1995

So far, GROW T.O. has produced the first useable map\inventory of community gardens in Toronto, conducted garden tours by bike, participated in public events, organized seed and seedling donations and moved its demonstration

site to a beautiful new area. Five new gardens sites were catalogued in 1994. In 1995, one group is known to be attempting to use the Garden City Report as a guide for its activities. This group has run into opposition because some community residents would prefer not making any changes in the landscape. GROW T.O. has helped gauge the knowledge of community gardening among the various city departments responsible for implementing the recommendations of the Garden City Report. The Department of Parks and Recreation is considering a proposal to locate three new allotments in city parks. In spring of 1995, GROW T.O. suspended operations due to volunteer fatigue and lack of funding. An attempt will be made to continue publishing the GROW T.O. newsletter.

The Food Action Project, serving low-income citizens, closed in July, 1993. However FoodShare has hired a school and community garden resource person in 1995 to try and pick up some of the slack created by the 1993 staff lay-offs.

A Rooftop Gardens Resource Group, consisting mostly of design professionals, has been meeting for almost two years now. Its mission is to raise awareness of the need for off-grade greenery in the City of Toronto. Because of the lack of vacant lots in Toronto, this group could play a key future role in the development of more gardens on off-grade sites.

A School Gardens and Composting Committee has been meeting for the past two years and has evolved into a group that educates parents and teachers on the benefits of gardening and composting by hosting seminars. So far, they have successfully conducted five seminars. More schools are attempting to green their school yards and incorporate these lessons into their curriculum, but many challenges remain.

Metro Toronto is well respected for its commitment to community composting. More than 25 housing complexes (the largest having 500 occupants) have installed triple-bin compost systems. These complexes are mainly housing co-operatives that want the compost for their own landscapes. As a new initiative, community composting will need more research and evaluation. The Recycling Council of Ontario had been training Master Composters to help with these types of initiatives but no longer does so.

2.3 Key Challenges for the Future

The establishment of a vigorous community gardening culture in Toronto has not yet taken place. In the 1970s, Toronto's neighbourhood groups did not turn to community gardening as a community development tool. The reason probably had to do with lack of vacant lots in the city compared to cities in the eastern United States. In Montreal, progressive city bureaucrats received

considerable support for community gardening programs. This has not yet happened in Metro Toronto except perhaps in the City of Etobicoke where participation in community gardening has been relatively good.

If Healthy City principles can be implemented in Toronto, and if the partnership of citizens and government becomes more effective, then community gardening may eventually become a valued activity and land use in Toronto.

Appendix 1

The total area with allotment gardens in the Metropolitan Toronto is about 62,180 m² or 6.2 ha (see Table 1 below). The City of Etobicoke has the largest area with 22,500 m² or 2.25 ha, representing 36.2% of the garden area in Metropolitan Toronto and the Borough of East York has the smallest area of 3,136 m² or 0.3 ha, representing 5.0% of The total area.

Table 1: Summary of Allotments Gardens in Metropolitan Toronto.

	Numbers of Plots (N) and Total Area (A)	Rent Price (year)	Characteristics
Borough of East York	N: 98 (8m X 4m) A: 3,136 m ²	\$10.00	no security system; no information about waiting list.
City of Etobicoke	N: 500 (6m X 7.5m) A: 22,500 m ²	\$40.00	no security system; no waiting list.
City of North York	N: 245 (6m X 7.5m) A: 11,025 m ²	\$25.00	security fences; waiting list: 30 persons.
City of Scarborough	N: 400 (3m X 6m) A: 7,200 m ²	\$13.00	security fences; compost provided; waiting list: 10 persons.
City of Toronto	N: 225 (3m X 6m) A: 4,050 m ² N: 109 (6m X 9m) A: 5,886 m ² N: 24 (6m X 9m) A: 1,296 m ²	\$10.00 \$20.00 \$20.00	security fences; waiting list: 80 persons.
City of York	N: 126 (7.5m X 7.5m) A: 7,087.5 m ²	\$35.00	composting provided; security fences; light at night; waiting list: 5 persons.
Total Area for Metro Toronto	N: 1,727 plots A: 62,180 m ²		

Source: Eguillor, P. Urban Food Production: A Seed For Sustainable Cities? Master's thesis in Planning, University of Toronto, 1993.

The original version of the preceding paper was presented at:

Habitat 94: New Frontiers in Housing & Planning
Canadian Institute of Planners & International Federation for Housing & Planning

**Cities Feeding People: Urban Agriculture and City Planning
in the North & the South**

Session D1, Edmonton Convention Centre

September 20, 1994, 15:30 - 17:00

Edmonton, Alberta, Canada

This panel discussed and compared the recent evolution of food production within and on the edge of cities in the North and the South, its current significance (land use, practitioners, consumers, share of urban food supply, market value). It presented recent changes in official recognition, regulation and promotion of urban agriculture. The panel addressed important challenges for urban agriculture which the city planning community can assist in overcoming to render our cities more sustainable. The session included a 10-minute introduction, four 15-minute presentations, and a 20-minute question and answer period.

"Urban Food Production: A Survey of Evolution, Official Support and Significance (with special reference to Africa)"*

Chairperson: Luc J.A. Mougeot, Senior Program Officer, International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Ottawa, Ontario, Canada (fax: 613-567-7749).

"Promoting Urban Agriculture: A Strategy Framework for Planners in North America, Europe and Asia"

Speaker: Paul Sommers, Tropical Horticulture Consultant, and Jac Smit, President, The Urban Agriculture Network, Washington, D.C. USA (fax: 202-986-6732).

"Urban Agriculture and The Sustainable Dar-es-Salaam Project, Tanzania"

Speaker: Camillus Sawio, UNCHS-IDRC Research Project Coordinator, Department of Geography, University of Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania (fax: 255-51-43038/46718).

"Une Histoire des Deux Villes: Comparing Canadian Community Gardening Programs in Montreal and Toronto"

Speaker: Sean Cosgrove, Design Consultant, Toronto Food Policy Council, and Board Member of American Community Gardening Association, Toronto, Canada (fax: 416-393-1357).

"Urban Agriculture: Can Planners Make a Difference?"*

Speaker: Timothy Greenhow, Urban/Regional Planner, SWEDEPLAN - International Divisional of Sweden's National Board of Housing, Building and Planning, Stockholm, Sweden (fax: 46-8-644-4689).

* Opinions expressed in the papers do not necessarily represent the views of the institutions to which their authors are affiliated.